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GEOGRAPHIC

# TRAVELLER

# USA

# GREAT AMERICAN JOURNEYS

FROM DRIVING ROUTE 66 TO  
HIKING THE APPALACHIANS



2026

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## WHERE TO STAY

# THE NEW MOTEL

Neon signs are flickering back to life along Route 66 as a new generation of motel owners lovingly restores the road's mid-century properties — and adds a few contemporary upgrades into the mix

### Americana Motor Hotel

#### Best for: Space-age heritage

Cruise along Route 66 long enough and the neon signs start to sing a similar song: Elvis performed here, Elvis dined there. This lodge, a 10-minute drive from the cafes and breweries of Flagstaff town, adds a fresh riff. In addition to the King of Rock and Roll, it welcomed NASA astronauts, who trained for moon landings in northern Arizona's lunar-like landscape. It reopened after a full revamp in 2023, but an astronaut statue in the lobby still hints at its space-age legacy. The vintage nods continue in the rooms, where disco balls scatter light across wood-paneled walls, and shag-pile carpets swirl in burnt orange and midnight blue. The bang-for-your-buck room rates feel gloriously stuck in the 1960s, too. From \$114 (£85). [americanamotorhotel.com](http://americanamotorhotel.com)

### Arrive Albuquerque

#### Best for: An urban stay

This 137-room hideaway on Central Avenue — the section of Route 66 that cuts through Albuquerque — offers a thoroughly modern take on the urban motel. Built in 1965, it passed through various chains before reopening in 2025 under Palisociety, known for reimagining boutique hotels across the US — its most successful pairing to date. The interiors' clean lines and geometric prints nod to the building's original International Style design, and the rooms are accessed via open-air walkways. But there are mod-cons, too, like Grown Alchemist bath amenities and Peloton bikes in the 24-hour gym. Boozy slushies and chilli disco fries from the cocktail lounge are served to guests under poolside parasols. From \$121 (£90). [arrivehotels.com](http://arrivehotels.com)

### El Rey Court

#### Best for: Desert style

Built in 1936, when Route 66 still ran through Santa Fe, this motel returned in 2018 for a stylish second act. Californian creatives Jay and Alison Carroll took the reins, converting the whitewashed Pueblo Revival property into the hippest desert hangout in New Mexico's state capital. The rooms — some with patios, others with kitchenettes — all feature modish interiors. No two are quite alike, but many include woven tapestries, potted cactuses and crisscrossed rattan chairs. Daily events range from poolside yoga and music sets to queer nights, drawing a mix of locals and road-trippers. Fuel up with a breakfast burrito at the La Reina Mesita food truck to power through another sun-bleached stretch of Route 66. From \$167 (£125). [elreycourt.com](http://elreycourt.com)



The Americana Motor Hotel hosted astronauts during the space age  
From left: A room at Arrive Albuquerque; the hotel's geometric prints nod to its original design



**Classen Inn**  
**Best for: Maximalist design**

Minimalists, divert your eyes: this Oklahoma City roadside motel, dating back to 1963 and reopened in 2020, has been given a fabulously camp makeover. Local owners Steve Mason and Aimee Ahpeatone saw potential in one of the state's finest examples of futuristic Googie architecture, and after a flamboyant revamp, the building's swoon-worthy neon sign glows proudly out front once more. The 17 guest rooms have tropical wallpaper and playful pop art murals of pouting lips and racing stripes. There's even a dinky Superette minimarket selling ice-cold beers and kitschy trinkets, like vintage hotel keychains, in a psychedelic setting. Guests can borrow bikes to explore surrounding Midtown — there's a diner just down the street — then gather for sundowners on the rainbow-hued patio, where a swell old time is almost guaranteed. From \$117 (£87). [classenninn.com](http://classenninn.com)

**Motel Safari**  
**Best for: Warm welcomes**

Behind nearly every surviving mom-and-pop motel on Route 66 is a passionate preservationist, someone keeping the neon glowing long after most travellers sped off onto faster interstates. At this address in Tucumcari, a former railroad town in eastern New Mexico, that's Rich Havlik, who reopened the lodge in 2024. Posted behind the welcome desk, beside a model camel, the Minnesota-native wants guests to fall in love with the Mother Road as he did. The motel was built in 1959 in the Googie style and flaunts original features: a geometric sign out front, cinder block walls and 11 rooms decked out with jet-age furnishings, including Tivoli radios playing rockabilly at the bedside. As dusk settles, gather by the firepit, near a mural of Elvis standing by a Cadillac. A stay here is proof they don't make them like they used to. From \$123 (£92). [themotelsafari.com](http://themotelsafari.com)

**Blue Swallow Motel**  
**Best for: A roadside icon**

One of Route 66's most photogenic landmarks, the plucky Blue Swallow Motel has defied the odds, keeping its doors open even as the fortunes of Tucumcari faded. Do as James Dean once did and check in for the night. Built in 1939, the motor-court motel is a shining example of Southwest Vernacular design, its blush-pink stucco walls dotted with seashells and garage bays tucked between rooms. The owners are doing a major revamp, and it all looks in great shape. Inside, 24 guest rooms are a vision of chintz-chic charm. Vintage chenille bedspreads, chalkware lamps and rotary phones nod to its original era, while plush mattresses cater to modern travellers. Twilight is when the motel truly shines: the swallow-shaped neon sign flickers on, its glowing promise of '100% Refrigerated Air' casting a cinematic light across the forecourt. From \$120 (£95). [blueswallowmotel.com](http://blueswallowmotel.com)